



Poverty and Illiteracy in Tennessee

>In Tennessee, 19% of children under 18 live in poverty. The number of very young children in our state who live in poverty is 26%. Out of a typical group of 20 children who live in poverty:

- **11** will repeat one or more grades;
- **9** will need special education because their IQ is less than 85;
- **7** will commit five or more crimes and will require incarceration;
- **16** will not have the skills required for post-secondary education;
- **11** will not graduate from high school.

Poverty is the economic status for one of every five Tennessee children.

>In Tennessee, 21% of adults have Level 1 literacy skills (on a 1-5 scale, with 1 the lowest). Adults at Level 1 literacy have difficulty with reading, writing, and computational skills. They usually cannot:

- determine their workplace benefits from a provided table of benefits, or
- locate an intersection on a street map, or
- locate two pieces of information in a sports article, or
- identify and enter background information on a Social Security card application, or
- calculate total costs of a purchase from an order form.

Level 1 is the literacy status of one in every five adult Tennesseans.

Tennessee Department of Education

What Is Family Literacy?

Family Literacy Programs...

- aim to break the intergenerational cycle of low literacy skills and resulting poverty.
- focus on both children and parents, with the family as the unit of service.
- are community-based collaborations.
- build solid community relationships to support families.
- may serve English language learners, migrant families, and other families with distinct and special needs.

The **Adult Education** segment of the Family Literacy model seeks to provide parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency. The parent's attitude about learning will become the child's. Enhanced reading, math, and language skills will lead parents to set goals for both their children's and their own educational and personal achievements.

The Family Literacy model also seeks to provide **young children** with age-appropriate education to prepare them for success in school and life.

Parent support and education, a pivotal concept of the Family Literacy model, seeks to show parents how to be the primary teachers for their children, and full partners in their children's education.

The Family Literacy model culminates in Parent and Child Together (**PACT**) Time, comprising interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.

There are many Family Literacy programs, both public and community-based, throughout Tennessee, and many other education programs, such as Head Start, consider the Family Literacy concept an extremely important component in accomplishing their own missions. The Tennessee Department of Education sponsors Even Start Family Literacy Programs in 25 counties, and One-Room Drop-In School programs in three counties. To find out more about these and other family literacy programs in Tennessee, go to <http://www.state.tn.us/education/sp/familitprogsumm.pdf>.



Data sources: Kids Count 2001, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth; The High/Scope Education Research Foundation Perry Preschool Project (1991); Family Literacy in Tennessee: A Design for the Future (Benner, 2002).